



MWACOP NEWS NOTES

MARCH 2016

Midwest Area Council for Office Professionals

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MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

Welcome to the spring issue of News Notes! In anticipation of mid-term appraisals, ARMPs cycle, and annual reports, the Midwest Area Council for Office Professionals decided to distribute the spring issue of News Notes in March instead of May. Our goal is to include helpful information on how to survive and thrive during this busy season.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the PSA Refresher and New PSA-Secretary training. There was an excellent attendance of 26 people. Thank you, Kelli Adkins (Lexington, KY), for preparing the MWACOP brochure that was distributed at the training.

As of the June conference call, there will be a rotation of Council members. Vicki Jones will rotate off the Council. Vicki has served as the News Notes editor for three years. Thank you, Vicki, for all you have done for the Council; we appreciate you! Also on the June call, Jessica Michael will assume the Sr. Co-Chair role. Beth Burmeister will transition into the Ex Officio role.

Would you like to join the MWACOP? Two three-year rotating positions will be available for the term starting in June. The application and instructions will be sent via email and posted on the MWACOP website.

Please join us in welcoming Darriel Simons (Ames, IA), Orlando Guzman (Ames, IA), Kerri Bentley (Columbia, MO), and Jessica Herold (Urbana, IL) to ARS and specifically the Midwest Area!

The Round Table discussion on renewing official passports with Kit Mernick and Joyce Hamilton was held on March 23rd at 1:30 p.m. CST. Thank you to Kelli Adkins for arranging and Lori Burma for hosting this event.

Due to the Area restructure at the beginning of FY 2014, the number of Areas changed from seven to five. To accommodate representation from all the Areas, the National Advisory Council for Office Professionals (NACOP) requested that the Midwest Area nominate a second representative. Congratulations to Debi Schaefer (Madison, WI) on being selected to join Lori Burma in representing the Midwest Area!

We hope you all have used Axon for some of your daily work as it is a great source of information. The past month we have been sending MWACOP SOP links to Axon. Soon we will be able to access our SOP from the Agency's website.

Best wishes on a productive spring season!
Beth Burmeister and Jessica Michael, Co-Chairs

WELCOME TO MWA! By Beth Burmeister**Welcome, Darriel Simons**

Darriel (pronounced like Ariel with a preceding D) Simons joined the Infectious Bacterial Diseases Research Unit in Ames, Iowa, as a PSA on December 14, 2015.

Darriel began her Civil Service career in 1994 while attending Bismarck State College working as a co-op student at USDA-ARS-Northern Great Plains Research Laboratory in Mandan, North Dakota. After graduating with a medical secretary degree, she accepted a full-time position as the location secretary. Life events took Darriel in and out of federal service over time, but ultimately she returned to civil service in 2000 when she joined the Veterans Administration working for the Minot Community-Based Outpatient Clinic at the Minot Air Force Base. Later she transferred with the VA to the Aberdeen Community-Based Outpatient Clinic as a Patient Service Representative.

She continued working with the VA until she moved to Iowa in 2010 and accepted a job promotion as secretary for the USDA-ARS-Animal Resources Unit (ARU) in Ames. She resigned from ARU in April 2014 to care for her son, who was born pre-mature and spent the first several weeks of his life in Rochester, Minnesota.

Darriel resides in Bradford, Iowa, with her husband, Kyle, who is a farmer and works full-time for Franklin County Secondary Roads, and her two sons: Garrett (17) and Nolan (1). The family's newest addition is a yellow lab named Charley. In her spare time, Darriel enjoys baking, cooking, gardening, fishing, traveling, and spending time with her family.

Welcome, Kerri Bentley

As of March 7, Kerri Bentley is the new PSA at the Plant Genetics Research Unit in Columbia, Missouri. Kerri may be a new PSA, but she is not new to her unit. Kerri served six and a half years as an Office Automation Assistant. She filled in for the position in October 2014 when Heather Lewandowski accepted an AO position.

Prior to ARS, Kerri received a Psychology degree from Central Methodist University. After graduating, Kerri worked as an Administrative Assistant with the City of Columbia for six years. She heard about the ARS vacancy from a mutual friend. She pursued it because of the flexibility ARS offers.

In her spare time, Kerri loves to spend time with her husband and 2 daughters who are 7 and 10 years old. Kerri enjoys camping, attending her daughter's sporting events, cooking, and shopping.

Welcome, Jessica Herold

Jessica Herold joined the Location Support Staff in Urbana, Illinois, as an Office Automation Assistant in August 2015.

This is Jessica's first federal position. She graduated with a BA degree in English from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Following graduation, she managed movie theaters in Tennessee and Ohio for 10 years. Jessica returned to school and received paralegal certification from the University of Cincinnati.

After working in management and customer-service positions, Jessica was ready for a change. She saw the vacancy announcement in USAjobs.com, applied, accepted the position, and relocated to Urbana. Jessica made these comments about her new position with ARS: "There is rarely a dull moment. I am adding things to my notes daily. The customer-service level is more relaxed than the movie theater."

In Jessica's spare time, she writes short stories and volunteers with the Girl Scouts – she was a Girl Scout for 10 years and received the Gold award. She loves being outside, taking hikes (especially in the mountains), riding her bike to work, taking photos, and traveling.

PSA-Refresher and New PSA-Secretary Training**February 23-25, 2016 by Dorene Hensler**

Training for new office professionals and their mentors was held on February 23-25, 2016, at the Midwest Area office in Peoria, Illinois. Twenty people from throughout the Midwest Area were in attendance, including six mentors for the new PSAs/Secretaries.



Left to Right, First Row: Debi Schaefer, Lori Wilson-Voss, Jessica Michael, Sherri Buxton, Christine Sapp, Second Row: Darriel Simons, Lori Burma, JoAnn Volk, Jessica Herold, Amy Bownds, Nancy Sanders, Larla Moore, Sherri Egbert, Marci Bushman, Vicky Brooks, Third Row: Kim Meyers, Kerri Bentley, Melanie Moore, Chad Henry, Jessica Boyer, Kit Mernick, Orlando Guzman, Dorene Hensler

Dr. Alberto Pantoja, Associate Director for the Midwest Area, started off the training on Tuesday morning by welcoming everyone and sharing some of his background and work experience with the group.

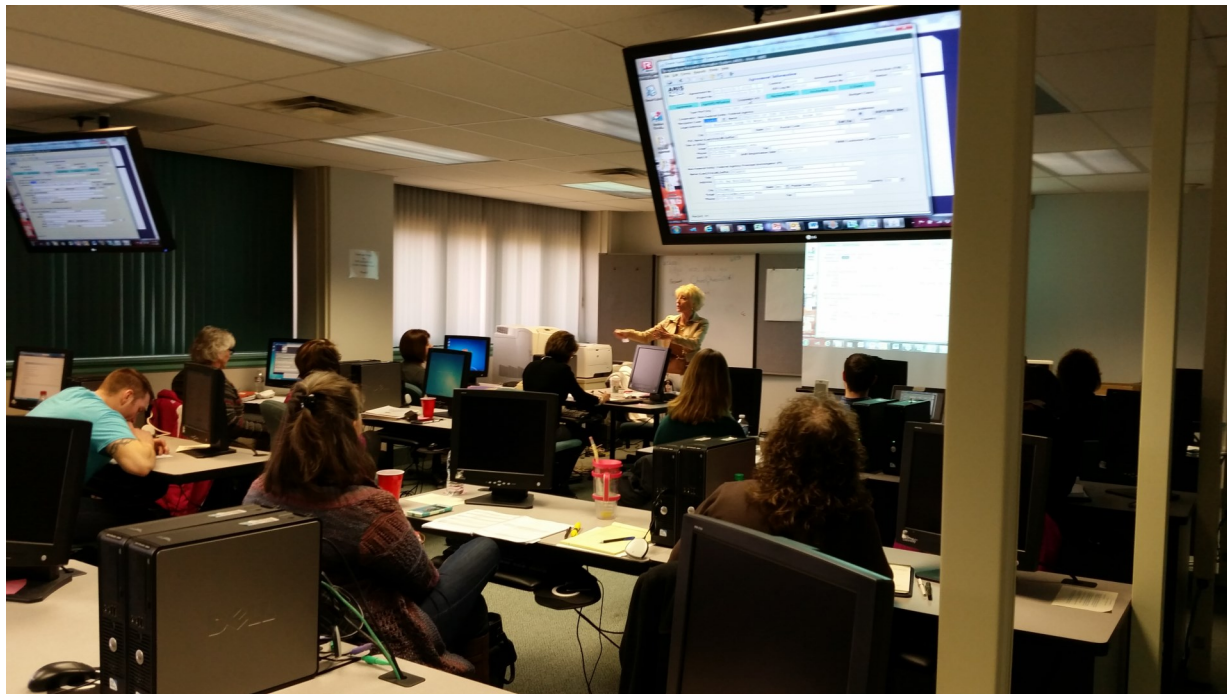
After the welcome, Lori Burma and Debi Schaefer, National Advisory Council for Office Professionals (NACOP) representatives and technical advisors to the Midwest Council for Office Professionals (MWACOP), provided helpful tips and experiential insight to the group, focusing on Office Savvy/Customer Service, Use of the SOP Manual, Correspondence and Axon.

The first morning session was concluded with presentations by Kathy Jones, Executive Assistant to the Associate Director and the MWA contact for Ethics and RPES. Regarding ethics, Kathy told the group where to find the latest ethics forms online and reviewed the appropriate form to complete for a particular outside activity. Kathy also reviewed some ethics policies relative to the workplace: fundraising, engaging in politics, running for public office, accepting gifts from outside sources, accepting honorarium, and use of ARS.USDA.GOV email.

PSA-Refresher and New PSA-Secretary Training (continued)**February 23-25, 2016 by Dorene Hensler**

A review of MWA RPES procedures followed, beginning with the MWA RPES SharePoint site and the information that can be found there, then moving on to the formatting and naming of documents that need to be uploaded for a case write-up. Kathy finished up the presentation by explaining how to add updates to a RPES case write-up after the final has been submitted, the possible decisions the review panel may make, and early or delayed reviews.

Concluding the first day of training, Lori Wilson-Voss, Program Analyst for the Midwest Area, provided an overview of ARIS. Lori led the group through discussions about OSQR, PDRAMS, finding information in and generating reports from ARIS, and entering and updating ARS-115s. As an activity, the group reviewed 115 citations and identified errors, emphasizing the need to double-check citations when they are initially generated and again if they are changed.



PSA-Refresher and New PSA-Secretary Training (continued)**February 23-25, 2016 by Dorene Hensler**

On days two and three of the training the group was split in half, with each half of the group attending ARIS training on one day and Travel Training on the other day.



Kit Mernick, EBSC Travel Specialist, guided each group through the newly-updated Midwest Area Travel Points binder, providing guidelines about split travel reimbursement, visa applications, and FTIS entries. She also explained how to delete a traveler from the drop down list in Concur, how to check in Concur and see if a traveler has credit for a non-refundable airline ticket that was canceled, details about the US Bank travel card and its use, and entering a portal ticket to request merging FMMI profiles of a new government employee that previously traveled as a non-government employee. In addition to the training, Kit answered numerous travel questions from each group.

Lori Wilson-Voss shared her recently updated ARIS guidebook, and, with the assistance of Chad Henry, led the group through the steps of entering a new incoming agreement into ARIS and the addition of AIMS information. Lori reviewed the different types of incoming and outgoing agreements, making code requests, entering 417 codes, remarks for the comments tab, and revising an incoming agreement when the funded dollar amount is less than the proposed dollar amount. JoAnn Volk, EBSC Grants Management Specialist, sat with the group during the training, providing informative guidance on the AIMS side of things and answering questions.

Sherri Buxton did a terrific job of organizing the presenters and the training, hosting the attendees and keeping all of us on track for three days. This event was an excellent opportunity to learn more about the tasks that PSAs and Secretaries frequently perform, and to network with long-standing coworkers and establish relationships with new ones.



LOOK OUT FOR
UPCOMING PROJECT DATES AND FINAL INSTRUCTIONS by Jacqueline Klaver

Mid-Year Progress Review Accountability and Reporting ALREADY Started!!!!

The Department's Cultural Transformation Action Plan requires that the performance plans of all SES, managers, and supervisors include standards that hold the supervisor or manager accountable for the performance management of subordinates. Full compliance with the requirements of the DR 4040-430 will be a significant factor in achieving those performance standards, for both first-line supervisors and managers to whom they report, as they are in turn accountable for overseeing the responsibilities for their subordinate supervisors.

Once the formal mid-year progress review is completed, the rating official and employee must both initial the original *Performance Plan, Progress Review, and Appraisal Worksheet* (form AD-435E or AD-435S). The supervisor must retain the AD-435E or AD-435S in their performance files. They are not required to be submitted to the Performance and Awards Staff (PAS) at this time.

The Performance Accountability Database (PAD) must be updated by **April 30** to verify compliance review requirements. PAD is used to track and report to USDA/OHRM agency's compliance on conducting mid-year progress reviews on a monthly basis until 100% compliance is reached. Compliance data is reflected in the Cultural Transformation Report and submitted to the USDA Secretary for review. Tracking Agency's compliance ensures employee's rights are safeguarded, promotes a healthy working environment, and fosters a results driven organization.

Contact: For additional information regarding the FY 2016 Mid-Year Guidance, please contact: performance@ars.usda.gov or Mr. Leopold Valdez on (301) 504 -1535, email Leopold.Valdez@ars.usda.gov.



ARMPs Process ALREADY Started!!!!

April through the end of July is annual budget time and throughout the Midwest area, decisions are being made and what-ifs are being considered. This time of year we spend hours loading ARMPs, and fussing over Microsoft Excel Spreadsheets.

******Start now to compile data for ARMPs process. Gather information from SYs for anticipated needs of equipment, travel, and personnel for FY 2017.******

Reviews are being scheduled and all final updates to ARMPs must be made by August 20, 2016. Sherri Buxton sent out a memo on 3/9/2016 for the FY 2017 Annual Resource Management Plan Guidance. Included are the ARMP Guidance memo and the nine enclosures. The Supplemental Business Service Center Guidance was included as Enclosure 9. Due to several system updates, the ARMP system will be officially **open on Friday, April 1, 2016**. However, if these updates are completed earlier, the system will be open as soon as possible.



LOOK OUT FOR UPCOMING PROJECT DATES AND FINAL INSTRUCTIONS CONTINUED
by Jacqueline Klaver



Annual Reports (421s) Start Mid April 2016

Lori Wilson-Voss will send detailed instructions on annual reports by email by mid April 2016. Annual reports are due to the Area Office by early August 2016. Additional information on annual reports can be found at this link: <http://www.npstaff.ars.usda.gov/ARIS/Manual/>. The ARIS on-line manual is an excellent source of information when entering annual reports.

•Why do we do annual reports?

The AD-421 informs a wide audience about the progress and accomplishments of the Agricultural Research Service (ARS). Some of the uses of the reports include, but are not limited to, input for the National Program Annual Reports (NPARs), ARS Annual Performance Reports (APR), and various other Annual and Retrospective Progress Reports, various internet web postings, sources for official

speeches, Congressional information public relations material, administrative decision-making at all levels, and budgetary decisions.

•Technology Transfer

Reports are required annually for all projects that are active between 10/01/15 to 9/30/16 as well as any expired projects to complete the termination process. So, start gathering together your status data on Technology Transfer for all new and active CRADAs, MTAs, Invention Disclosures, Patent Applications, New Germplasm Releases, New Commercial Licenses Granted, Web Sites Managed, etc.

•115's for Annual Report Documentation

*All 115's that are published date between 10/1/2015 and 9/30/2016 will be included in the annual report documentation.

*If there are no publications to enter, leave the field blank. Do not include a publication if it is not **in print**. "In Press" or "Accepted" are not acceptable.

*Only Peer Reviewed Journal Articles (J); Review Articles (R) related to the subject of the project; Book or Book Chapters (B); Germplasm Registration Articles (H), or Natural Resources Research Update (U) can be listed under the publication section. Publications must include a complete journal citation.

*ARIS will automatically check for use of publications in prior years (using 115 log numbers). If used in a previous year, ARIS will not allow inclusion in the current fiscal year. In addition, once a 115 is used on a 421, the 115 will be marked as "Used on 421" for future reference. Prior year publication(s) may be listed in this fiscal year's reporting timeframe only if they were not listed in a prior reporting cycle. There is no length limitation for publication citations.

*Publications may be listed on multiple projects within the management unit, IF the research specifically relates to that project and associated scientists have contributed to the publication.

*Co-authors, located in other management units, may include the publication(s) in annual reports for their own management units. The ARS-115 log number is used to select each publication to be entered, therefore, there must be an approved "ARS-115 Manuscript Approval" for every publication.

**LOOK OUT FOR UPCOMING PROJECT DATES AND FINAL INSTRUCTIONS CONTINUED****by Jacqueline Klaver****Research Associate Program – Class of 2016 Start Early May 2016**

The call for proposals for Headquarters-funded ARS Research Associates (or Post-Doc program) will be sent out early May 2016. Proposals are to be electronically submitted in ARIS June 1 through approximately July 1, 2016.

ARIS Actions Start Mid July 2016

Around Mid July 2016 will be the deadline for outgoing agreements (NACAs, Grants, Assistance-Type Cooperative Agreements, Non-Funded Cooperative Agreements, and Memorandum of Understandings). More information will be provided at a later time due to the uncertainty with the 5% cut for ARS. You may also visit the MWACOP website at <http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/mwacop/sop/index.html>.

Another Wonderful Group Training Photo from February 2016



From Left to Right, Front Row: Vicky Brooks, Orlando Guzman, Christine Sapp, Kathy Jones, Chad Henry, Jessica Michael
Back Row: Jessica Boyer, Marci Bushman, Nancy Sanders, Lori Burma, Darriel Simons, Kit Mernick, Kerry Bentley, Lori Wilson-Voss, Larla Moore, Jessica Herold, Sherry Egbert, Melanie Moore, Amy Bownds, Dorene Hensler, Debi Schaefer, Kim Meyers, JoAnn Volk

ANNUAL REPORT TIPS

by Jacqueline Klaver

Detail by Author Reports: Remember to run Detail by Author Reports at least four times a year. It is important that the scientist keep their 115s up to date, by adding submission, acceptance, publication date and citation.

Steps for running the Detail by Author Reports in ARIS:

- Research Documentation
- Reports
- 115 Author Reports
- Remove 50 from mode code
- Insert Submission dates (e.g.: 10/01/2016:9/30/2017)
- Author's last name
- Click on Query
- When list is created, click on Action
- Mark all records then click on Reports
- Select Detail by Author



How to Print Summary Annual Report:

Following are steps to print the Summary Report lists for all the projects requiring an annual report for your unit. From the ARIS main screen go to:

- Research Documentation
- Status
- Annual 421 Reports
- Query
- In the query screen click on the ?
- Enter your modecode (e.g.: 50%XX%XX)
- Enter
- Click on Action
- Mark All Records
- Click on Print
- Summary

MWACOP Members

Please contact us with your ideas, questions, or concerns.

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